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PREVENTING COYOTE CONFLICTS: How to Keep Coyotes Out of Your Yard and Keep Your Pets Safe

Coyotes generally avoid humans, even when their home range encompasses largely urban or suburban habitat. However, the presence of a free buffet in the form of pet food, compost or trash can lure coyotes into yards and create the impression that these places are bountiful feeding areas. Without the lure of food or other attractants, their visits will be brief and rare. But a coyote who finds food in one yard may learn to search for food in others.

What attracts coyotes to urban and residential areas?

Food

Deliberately feeding coyotes is a mistake. You may enjoy hand-feeding animals, but this is a surefire way to get them accustomed to people and will ultimately lead to their demise. Here are some other general rules to follow:

- Avoid feeding pets outside. If you must, feed them only for a set time during the day (for no more than one hour) and remove the food bowl as soon as your pet has finished her meal.
- In dry conditions, water can be as alluring as food, so remove water bowls set outside for pets and make watering cans unavailable.
- If you compost, use enclosed bins and never compost meat or fish scraps.
- Good housekeeping, such as regularly raking areas around bird feeders, can also help discourage coyote activity near residences.
- Remove fallen fruit from the ground.
- Keep trash in high-quality containers with tight-fitting lids. Only place the cans curbside the morning of collection. If you leave them out overnight, they are more likely to be tipped and broken into.

Shelter

Coyotes are secretive animals, and studies have shown they can live for a long time in close proximity to dense human settlements without ever being noticed. Such coyotes are abiding by the rules we set for minimal conflicts, and should be left alone.

In the spring, when coyotes give birth and begin to raise litters, they concentrate their activities around dens or burrows in which the young are sheltered. At these times, they may become highly defensive and territorial, and challenge any other coyote or dog that comes close to the pups. People walking their dogs in parks and wooded areas may run into these situations and even be challenged by parent coyotes to back off. Fights occur rarely and most often when dogs are off leash. It's important to recognize such incidents for what they are: defense of space, not random attacks. If you encounter a coyote when walking your pet, do NOT run away; haze the coyote with the techniques described in our **Hazing Guidelines**.

Free-roaming pets

Free-roaming pets, especially cats and sometimes small dogs, may attract coyotes into certain neighborhoods. Although coyotes are primarily nocturnal, the best way to minimize risk to pets is not to leave them out unattended at any time. Don't allow your cat to roam freely. Ideally, cats should be kept



indoors regardless of whether there is a coyote in the area or not—to keep cats safe and healthy as well as to keep them from killing birds and other wildlife.

Feral cat colonies

People who feed feral cats are often concerned coyotes might prey on the cats. These concerns are well founded, as coyotes will be attracted to both the outdoor pet food and the cats themselves as prey.

Here are some general suggestions for keeping such cats safer:

- Feed cats only during the day and at a set time— and pick up any leftovers immediately. Provide escape routes for cats. In treeless or open areas, erect "cat posts" (see below).
- Elevate feeding stations beyond coyotes'—but not the cats'—reach. The size of the station/s can be customized to the size of the colony you feed and the amount of food should be adjusted for the number of cats you feed. Avoid leftovers that attract other animals. Elevated feeding stations mean safer cats, no more messy, turned over bowls and great savings in cat food bills!
- In places where trees and other climbing opportunities are scarce, some people have reported success protecting barn and feral cats from coyotes by giving the cats escape routes in the form of "cat posts." These can be wooden posts (four inches by four inches or corner posts) that stand out of the ground at least ten to twelve feet and can be climbed by cats, but not by coyotes.
- Discourage/harass coyotes seen on the property. Go after them aggressively, using the techniques described in our **Hazing Guidelines**. Making them feel uncomfortable will encourage them to stay out of the area.

Risks to dogs

Dogs (especially small dogs) are also vulnerable to coyote confrontations. These incidents generally involve coyotes who are either accustomed (habituated) to people (usually due to wildlife feeding), or coyotes who are protecting their territory and pups (usually during breeding season).

Dogs (especially small dogs) should not be left outside unattended and should always be kept on a leash in public areas. It is important to never let your dog interact or play with a coyote. Pet food and water should be kept indoors to avoid attracting coyotes to your yard.

Although "attacks" on larger dogs are rarer, coyotes will sometimes go after a large dog when they feel that their territory is threatened. This generally occurs during the coyote breeding season, which takes place from January through March. During this time, it is especially important not to leave dogs outside unattended and to keep them on leashes when in public areas.

To further protect cats and dogs, fencing can be used to keep coyotes out of residential yards. Fences must be at least 6 feet tall, extend underground at least 12 inches or include an L-shaped mesh apron extending outward at least 18 inches and secured with landscaping staples. Devices such as the "coyote roller" (www.coyoteroller.com) "roll off" coyotes that try to scramble over the fence and can enhance the effectiveness of a fence. Do-it-yourself options include adding PVC piping or chicken wire to the top of your fence to prevent coyotes from jumping over, and retrofitting a mesh apron to the bottom of the fence (extending 12+ inches out, secured with landscaping staples) to keep coyotes from digging under.

For more information and tips, see our website: www.humanesociety.org/animals/coyotes